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Security Council

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Provisional

8225th meeting
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New York

President:	Mr. Meza-Cuadra	(Peru)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Threats to international peace and security

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Threats to international peace and security

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

Mr. De Mistura is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: This emergency meeting of the Security Council underscores the gravity of the events in recent days in Syria, of which there are severe consequences for civilians. It takes place at a time of increased international tensions, drawing national, regional and international actors into dangerous situations of potential or actual confrontation. It is an important meeting.

There is an urgent need for the Council to address the situation with unity and purpose. How did we reach this point? The month of March saw devastating violence in part of eastern Ghouta, which resulted in at least 1,700 people killed or injured in opposition-controlled areas, dozens and dozens of people killed or injured in Government-controlled areas and, ultimately, the evacuation of 130,000 people, including fighters, family members and other civilians.

However, in Douma there was a fragile ceasefire, which continued for most of March. The United Nations good offices played an important role in that regard. Since 31 March, the United Nations has no longer been able to be involved in talks, since, at that time, the Syrian Government did not agree to our presence, although we made efforts to propose concrete ways to address the issues that we understood were arising in the continuing contacts, including the proposal to activate the detainee working group agreed in Astana. However, that proposal was not taken up at the time.

From 2 April, the evacuation of some 4,000 fighters, family members and other civilians from Douma to northern Syria took place. However, on 6 April there was a major escalation in violence. There were reports of sustained air strikes and shelling against Douma, the killing of civilians, the destruction of civilian infrastructure and attacks damaging health facilities. There were also reports of shelling on Damascus city, which reportedly again killed or injured civilians. Jaysh Al-Islam requested our involvement in emergency talks in extremis, but there was no positive response to that request when it conveyed the same message to the other side.

At approximately 8 p.m. local time on 7 April, reports of an alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma started to emerge. Pictures immediately circulated on social media showing what appeared to be lifeless men, women and children. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the ground claimed to have received hundreds of cases of civilians with symptoms consistent with exposure to chemical agents. The same NGOs claimed that at least 49 people had been killed and hundreds injured.

I wish to recall what the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, noted, namely, that the United Nations "is not in a position to verify these reports". However, he also made it very clear that he cannot ignore them and that he "is particularly alarmed by allegations that chemical weapons have been used against civilian populations in Douma" once again. He further emphasized "that any use of chemical weapons, if confirmed, is abhorrent and requires a thorough investigation".

I note that a number of States have strongly alluded to or expressed the suspicion that the Syrian Government was responsible for the alleged chemical attack. I also note that other States, as well as the Government of Syria itself, have strongly questioned the credibility of those allegations, depicting the attacks as a fabrication or/and a provocation. My comment is that this is one more reason for there to be a thorough independent investigation.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has said that it has made the preliminary analysis of the reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons and is in the process of gathering further information from all available sources. My colleague Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, who is with us in the Chamber today, will further address this matter. But I urge the Security Council, in accordance with its own mandate to maintain international peace and security and uphold international law, to, for God's sake, ensure that a mechanism is found to investigate these allegations and assign responsibility.

Returning to the narrative of the events, at around midnight on 7 April, hours after the alleged chemical-weapons attack, Jaysh Al-Islam informed the United Nations that it had reached an agreement with the Russian Federation and the Syrian Government. The Russian Federation Ministry for Defence stated that the agreement encompasses a ceasefire and Jaysh Al-Islam fighters laying down their arms or evacuating Douma. The Russian Federation also reported that up to 8,000 Jaysh Al-Islam fighters and 40,000 of their family members were to evacuate.

As I brief the Security Council now, we understand that additional evacuations from Douma are already under way. We have also received reports that some detainees — the ones we had heard about before — had begun to be released from Douma today. We note reports that the agreement provides for civilians who decide to stay to remain under Russian Federation guarantees, with the resumption of services in coordination with a local committee of civilians.

I urge the Syrian Government and the Russian Federation to ensure the protection of those civilians so that as many civilians as possible can stay in their homes if they choose to, or leave to a place of their own choosing or return as per international law. I urge that there be, for there should be, an immediate refocusing for the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). What we have see is basically an escalation before a de-escalation.

Clearly, the dangers of further escalation arise from situations beyond Ghouta as well. We have received reports of missiles targeting the Syrian Government's Tiyas, or T-4, airbase early this morning. No State has claimed responsibility for that reported strike. The United States and France have explicitly denied any involvement. The Syrian Government, the Russian Federation and Iran have suggested that Israel could have carried out the attack, with Iranian State media reporting that over a dozen military personnel were killed or injured, including four Iranian military advisers. The Government of Israel has not commented. The United Nations is unable to independently verify or attribute responsibility for that attack, but we urge all parties to show their utmost restraint and avoid any further escalation or confrontation.

We are also concerned about the dynamics in other areas of Syria. Syrians in Dar'a, northern rural Homs, eastern Qalamoun, Hamah and Idlib have all expressed to us their own fears that they may soon face escalations similar to what we have seen in eastern Ghouta. We therefore urge the Security Council and the Astana guarantors and those States involved in the Amman efforts to work towards reinstating de-escalation in those areas and elsewhere in Syria. The indications are the opposite at the moment.

Meanwhile, following its operations in Afrin, the Turkish Government has indicated the potential for further operations in other areas of northern Syria if Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat and Kurdish People's Protection Units forces are not removed from those areas. Military operations in such areas have the potential of raising international tensions. We therefore urge all parties concerned to de-escalate, show restraint and find means to implement resolution 2401 (2018) through dialogue and fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. Let me also highlight the fact that we have recently seen — and this is particularly tragic when we consider the efforts all of us, including all members of the Security Council, have made in the last year — the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant launch new operations within Syria, south of Damascus, in rural Damascus, in remote areas near the Iraqi border.

I would like to conclude with some bottom lines, if I may.

First, civilians are paying a very heavy price for the military escalation. We are not seeing de-escalation; we are seeing the contrary. Today our first priority must be to protect civilians from the war, from the conflict, from chemical weapons, from hunger. We call on all sides to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law, including humanitarian access across Syria to all people in need. We urge once

more for concrete respect for resolution 2401 (2018) throughout Syria, which is, after all, a resolution of the Security Council.

Secondly, continued allegations of the use of chemical agents are of extremely grave concern. Those allegations must be independently and urgently investigated. Any use of chemical weapons is absolutely prohibited and constitutes a very serious violation of international law, the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). Preventing impunity and any further use of chemical weapons and upholding international law must be an utmost priority for all members of the Security Council.

Thirdly, I have to say this very slowly because today is the first time, in over four years of briefing the Security Council in person, that I have reached a point in which I have to express a concern about international security, not just regional or national or Syrian security, but international security. Recent developments have more than ever before brought to the surface the dangers that the Secretary-General warned about recently at the Munich Security Conference, when he spoke of "different faultlines" in the Middle East that are interconnected and crossing each other, of conflicting interests of both global and regional Powers, and forms of escalation that can have absolutely devastating consequences that are difficult for us to even imagine. The Council cannot allow a situation of uncontrollable escalation to develop in Syria on any front. Instead, it must find unity and address the concrete threats to international peace and security in Syria today.

I am sorry to have been this brief, but I wanted to focus on one specific concern, namely, the threat to international security related to what we are seeing now in Syria and the danger of the alleged chemical-weapons attacks being repeated. Next time I will brief the Council on humanitarian and other issues and on the political process, which I know we are all interested in focusing upon, but today is the day for talking about security — international security — and peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his very informative briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Markram.

Mr. Markram: I thank you for the opportunity to address the Council again today, Mr. President. The High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, is away on official travel.

It has been less than a week since I last briefed the Council (see S/PV.8221) on the issue of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In the intervening period, new and deeply disturbing allegations of the use of chemical weapons have come to light. Over the past weekend, there have been reports on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma, in the Syrian Arab Republic. According to reports that came in yesterday, it is alleged that at least 49 people were killed and hundreds more injured in a chemical-weapon attack. More than 500 other individual cases reportedly presented with symptoms consistent with such an attack. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in touch with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the matter. The OPCW, which implements the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Syria is a State party, is gathering information about the incident from all available sources, through its Fact-finding Mission in Syria. After completing its investigation, the Fact-finding Mission will report its findings on the alleged attack to the States parties to the Convention.

Sadly, there is little to say today that has not already been said. The use of chemical weapons is unjustifiable. Those responsible must be held to account. That those views have been stated on many previous occasions does not lessen the seriousness with which the Secretary-General regards such allegations. Nor does it lessen the truth behind them, which is that what we are seeing in Syria cannot go unchallenged by anyone who values the decades of effort that have been put in to bring about the disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. As the body charged with the maintenance of international peace and security, the Council must unite in the face of this continuing threat and fulfil its responsibilities. To do otherwise, or simply to do nothing, is to accept, tacitly or otherwise, that such a challenge is insurmountable. The use of chemical weapons cannot become the status quo, nor can we continue to fail the victims of such weapons.

Just over one year ago, in responding to the attack on Khan Shaykhun, the Secretary-General called for those responsible to be held accountable, stating that there can be no impunity for such horrific acts. Just over one week ago, speaking on behalf of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, I noted that unity in the Security Council on a dedicated mechanism for accountability would provide the best foundation for success in that regard. I reiterate that belief here, as

well as the readiness of the Secretary-General and the Office for Disarmament Affairs to assist.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Markram for his informative briefing.

I now give the floor to members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): If you imagine, Mr. President, that I derive pleasure from the subject of my statement today, or from speaking at great length, you are wrong. Unfortunately, however, the situation is such that I have a lot to say today. And you will have to listen to me.

We thank Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Markram for their briefings.

The Russian Federation asked that this meeting be convened under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security" because we are deeply alarmed about the fact that a number of capitals — Washington first and foremost, with London and Paris blindly following its lead — are purposely steering a course designed to supercharge international tensions. The leadership of the United States, Britain and France, with no grounds and no thought for the consequences, are taking a confrontational line on Russia and Syria and pushing others towards it too. They have a broad range of weapons in their arsenal — slander, insults, bellicose rhetoric, blackmail, sanctions and threats of the use of force against a sovereign State. Their threats against Russia are brazen, and the tone they take has gone beyond the limits of the permissible. Even during the Cold War their predecessors did not express themselves so crudely about my country. What next?

I remember the rhetorical question that President Putin of Russia put to our Western partners, and especially the United States, from the rostrum of the General Assembly in 2015 (see A/70/PV.13), about their careless geopolitical experiments in the Middle East, when he asked them if they at least realized what they had done. At the time, the question went unanswered. But there is an answer, and it is that no, they do not realize what they have done. As they do not realize what they are doing now. It is not only we who are perplexed at their lack of any coherent strategy on any issue. It perplexes most of the people in this Chamber. They just do not want to ask them about it openly. Wherever they go, whatever they touch, they leave behind chaos in their wake in the murky water where they have gone fishing for some kind of fish. But the only fish they catch are mutants. I will ask them another rhetorical question. Do they understand the dangerous place they are dragging the world to?

One of the areas where the hostility manifests itself most strongly is Syria. The terrorists and extremists supported by external sponsors are being defeated. Let me remind those responsible that these are the terrorists and extremists whom they equipped, financed and dumped into the country in order to overthrow the lawful Government. Now we can see why this is causing hysteria among those who have invested their political and material capital in such dark forces.

In the past few weeks, thanks to Russia's efforts to implement the Security Council's resolutions, a massive operation has been carried out to unblock eastern Ghouta, whose residents have been forced to endure the humiliation of the rebel militias for several years. More than 150 thousand civilians were evacuated from this suburb of Damascus, completely voluntarily and under the necessary security conditions. Tens of thousands of them have already been able to return to liberated areas and many have been taken in by relatives. The changes in their demographic composition that the defenders of the Syrian opposition have been screaming about have not happened. That is a lie. Some extremely complex negotiations were conducted with the leaders of the armed groups, as a result of which many left the neighbourhoods they were occupying, with full guarantees for their security. Incidentally, there were several attempted acts of terrorism during these transport operations when militias tried to bring suicide belts onto the buses and were prevented. Others preferred to regulate their status with the Syrian authorities. Thanks to the presidential amnesty, they will now be able to return to civilian life, and may even eventually be able to join Syria's security forces. That represents the implementation of the United Nations principle of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration.

However, not everyone is so keen on such positive dynamics. The outside sponsors — that is, the leading Western countries — were ready to grasp at any straw in order to hang on to any centre of terrorist resistance, however tiny, within striking distance of the Syrian capital, so that the militias could continue to terrorize ordinary residents, taking their food and begging humanitarian aid from the international community. Incidentally, they were not about to

share medicines with those ordinary civilians, as an inspection of the strongholds left behind by the fighters revealed. As happened previously in eastern Aleppo, the improvised hospital facilities in basements were full of medicines that thanks to Western sanctions were not to be had for love or money in Damascus and other Government-controlled areas. Mass graves and bodies that showed evidence of torture were also discovered. The dimensions of the tunnels that the jihadists used were astonishing. Some of them could easily accommodate small trucks travelling in both directions. Those impressive underground facilities connected the positions of groups that some view as moderate to the strongholds of Jabhat Al-Nusra.

On 6 April, at their sponsors' instructions, Jaysh Al-Islam's new ringleaders prevented the fourth group of militia fighters from evacuating Douma and resumed rocket and mortar fire on residential areas of Damascus, targeting Mezzeh, Mezzeh 86, Ish Al-Warwar, Abu Rummaneh and Umayyad Square. According to official data, eight civilians were killed and 37 were wounded. It is regrettable that we seen no statements from Western capitals condemning the shelling of a historic part of Damascus.

The next day, 7 April, militias accused the Syrian authorities of dropping barrel bombs containing a toxic substance. However, they got their versions mixed up, referring to it sometimes as chlorine and sometimes as sarin or a mixture of poison gases. In a familiar pattern, the rumours were immediately seized on by non-governmental organizations financed by Western capitals and White Helmets operating in the guise of rescue workers. These so-called reports were also just as quickly disseminated through media outlets. I should once again point out that many of these dubious opposition entities have an accurate list of the email addresses of the representatives of Security Council members, which leads us to conclude that some of our colleagues, with a reckless attitude to their position, have been leaking sensitive information to those they sponsor. Incidentally, we all should remember the incident in which the White Helmets accidentally posted on the Internet a video showing the preparation stages for filming the next so-called victim of an attack allegedly perpetrated by the Syrian army. The chemical "series" that began in 2013 has continued to run, with each subsequent episode designed to top the impact of the previous one.

In Washington, London and Paris, conclusions have immediately been reached as to the guilt of the Syrian authorities, or regime, as they call it. Has no one wondered why Damascus needs this? While the Syrian leadership has received its share of insults, the main burden of responsibility has been laid at the door of Russia and Iran, to no one's surprise, I believe. As is now customary, it has occurred at lightning speed and without any kind of investigation. On 8 April, Syrian troops searching the village of Al-Shifuniya, near Douma, discovered a small, makeshift Jaysh Al-Islam chemical-munitions factory, along with German-produced chlorine reagents and specialized equipment.

The Istanbul-based opposition journalist Asaad Hanna posted a video on his Twitter feed that was allegedly from the area of the incident. In it, an unidentified individual in a gas mask, presumably from the White Helmets, is posing against a backdrop of a homemade chemical bomb that allegedly landed in a bedroom in a building in Douma. It is accompanied by commentary about what it calls another of the regime's attacks on civilians. There can be no doubt that this production was staged. The trajectory of the alleged bomb is entirely unnatural. It fell through the roof and landed gently on a wooden bed without damaging it in any way and was clearly placed there before the scene was shot.

In an interesting coincidence, the chemical act of provocation in Douma on Saturday, 7 April, occurred immediately after the United States delegation in the Security Council was instructed to call for expert consultations for today, Monday, 9 April, on its draft resolution on a mechanism for investigating incidents involving chemical weapons. Today far-reaching changes were made to the initial text. In such murky circumstances, of course, we have to determine what happened. But we have to do it honestly, objectively and impartially, without sacrificing the principle of the presumption of innocence and certainly not by prejudging the process of an investigation.

Despite this provocation, the Russian specialists have continued their efforts to resolve the situation in eastern Ghouta. On Sunday afternoon, 8 April, according to new agreements, the evacuation of Jaysh Al-Islam combatants was resumed. Following Douma's liberation from militants, Russian radiological, chemical and biological protection specialists were sent there to collect evidence. They took soil samples that showed no presence of nerve agents or substances

containing chlorine. Local residents and combatants who were no longer fighting were interviewed. Not one local confirmed the chemical attack. At the local hospital, no one with symptoms of sarin or chlorine poisoning had been admitted. There are no other active medical facilities in Douma. No bodies of people who had died from being poisoned were found, and the medical staff and residents had no information about where they might have been buried. Any use of sarin or chlorine in Douma is therefore unconfirmed. By the way, representatives of the Syrian Red Crescent refuted statements allegedly made on their behalf about providing assistance to victims of toxic gases.

I call on those who plan to denounce the regime when they speak after me to assume that there was no chemical-weapon attack.

Sweden has drafted a resolution calling for the incident to be investigated. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) does not need a resolution to investigate it, but we are willing to consider it. Today we propose to do what is envisaged in the draft resolution, which is to let the OPCW, which Mr. Üzümcü, Director-General of its Technical Secretariat, has announced is ready to deal with the situation, fly to Damascus immediately, if possible tomorrow. There the Syrian authorities and the Russian military will ensure the necessary conditions so that the OPCW experts can travel to the site of the alleged incident and familiarize themselves with the situation. That, by the way, is what President Trump and other Western leaders have been urging us to do.

The Syrians have repeatedly warned that there might be chemical provocations. At the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic they are saying that the equipment needed to film the next purported chemical attack has already been brought in. We have also made statements to that effect in the Security Council. Everyone has heard those warnings, but has deliberately ignored them because they do not correspond to the doctrinal positions espoused by those who dream of seeing the legitimate Government of yet another Arab country destroyed.

There has still been no attention given to the discovery in November and December 2017 of a significant quantity of chemical munitions on Syrian territory that had been liberated from militias. In terrorist warehouses in Az-Zahiriya and Al-Hafiya in Hama governorate, 20 one-ton containers and more than 50 pieces of ordnance containing toxic chemicals were discovered. In Tel Adel in Idlib governorate, 24 tons of toxic chemical, presumed to be chlorine, were discovered. At a storage site in Moadamiya, 30 kilometres to the north-east of Damascus, 240- and 160-millimetre-calibre munitions and plastic canisters of organo-phosphorous compounds were found. In the area around As-Suwayda in Idlib governorate, an manufacturing facility for synthesizing various toxic substances was found, along with 54 pieces of chemical ordnance and 44 containers of chemicals that could be used to manufacture toxic substances.

Since the beginning of this year alone, four instances of militias using toxic chemicals against Government troop positions have been established in Suruj and Al-Mushairfeh districts, and more than 100 Syrian troops have been hospitalized. On 3 March, during the liberation of Khazram and Aftris in eastern Ghouta, soldiers from a sub-unit of Government troops discovered an auxiliary workshop for homemade chemical munitions. This far from exhaustive list is an indication of the misdeeds of the still unreconciled opposition. And yet we have seen no eagerness to send OPCW expert groups there to collect evidence of these events. We demand that the OPCW verify all of these areas. They are accessible. We are also seeing information that American instructors in the Al-Tanf camp have trained a number of groups of fighters to carry out provocations using chemical weapons in order to create a pretext for a rocket strikes and bombings.

It has been clear to us that sooner or later there would be an attempt to bring the jihadists out of harm's way and at the same time to punish the regime that some Western capitals hate. The talking heads on television have thrown themselves into urging a repeat of last year's effort at a military attack on Syria. This morning there were missile strikes on the T-4 airfield in Homs governorate. We are deeply troubled by such actions.

The provocations in Douma are reminiscent of last year's incident in Khan Shaykhun, with their shared element being the planned nature of the attacks. Analysis of the operations conducted by the United States in April 2017, on the eve of the incident in Khan Shaykhun and after it, shows that Washington prepared its operation in advance. From 4 to 7 April of last year — in other words, from the day that a toxic substance was used in Khan Shaykhun until the strike on the Al-Shayrat airbase — the USS *Porter* and *Ross* naval destroyers

were already present in the Mediterranean Sea, where they were engaged in planned operations. They did not call into any ports where an exchange of munitions could have been effected as a way to increase their quantity of cruise missiles.

Specifically, from 4 to 5 April, the USS *Porter* was located south-east of Sicily and the *Ross* was en route from the Rota naval base to an area south of Sardinia. Later, on 6 April, both ships were observed moving at accelerated speed towards the area of the firing positions to the south-west of Cyprus, from where they launched a massive strike on Al-Shayrat on 7 April. However, the 59 Tomahawk missiles that were launched would have exceeded the two destroyers' total munitions capacity if they had actually been engaged in the anti-missile defence operations that they were assigned to, which required only 48 units. That means, therefore, that even before the chemical incident in Khan Shaykhun, these United States naval vessels undertook a military operation with a strike capability above the number of cruise missiles necessary for their anti-missile defence operations, which could be evidence of advance planning by Washington of an action against Damascus.

Among other things, Saturday's fake news from Douma was aimed at diverting the public's attention from the circus that is the Skripal case, in which London has become terminally mired, hurling completely unproven accusations at Russia and accomplishing its basic purpose of extracting solidarity from its allies in order to construct an anti-Russian front. Now the British are shifting away from a transparent investigation and concrete responses to the questions they have been asked while simultaneously covering their tracks.

At the Security Council meeting on 5 April on the Skripal case (see S/PV.8224), we warned the Council that the attempt to accuse us, without proof, of involvement in the Salisbury incident was linked to the Syrian chemical issue. There was an interesting new development regarding the issue yesterday. As Britain's Foreign Minister Boris Johnson was continuing his display of rapier wi. "exposing" Russia, another gem emerged. *The Times* informed us that Royal Air Force experts in southern Cyprus had intercepted a message sent from outside Damascus to Moscow on the day of the Skripals' poisoning that contained the phrase "the package has been delivered" and said that two people had "successfully departed". Apparently this formed part of the intelligence that London provided to its allies before expelling our Russian diplomats. Is not it obvious to everyone that there is an irrefutable Syria-Russia-Salisbury connection? I will give the British intelligence services one more huge hint, for free. Why do they not assume that the Novichok they are so thrilled about reached Salisbury directly from Syria? In a package. To cover its tracks. How pathetic.

Ambassador Haley recently stated that Russia will never be a friend of the United States. To that, I say that friendship is both reciprocal and voluntary. One cannot force a friendship and we are not begging the United States to be friends. What we want from it is very little — normal, civilized relations, which it arrogantly refuses, disregarding basic courtesy. However, the United States is mistaken if it thinks that it has friends. Its so-called friends are only those who cannot say no to it. And that is the only criterion for friendship that it understands.

Russia has friends. And unlike the United States, we do not have adversaries. That is not the prism through which we view the world. It is international terrorism that is our enemy. However, we continue to propose cooperating with the United States. That cooperation should be respectful and mutual, and aimed at resolving genuine problems, not imaginary ones, and it should be just as much in the interests of the United States. Ultimately, as permanent members of the Security Council, we have a special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Through the relevant channels, we already conveyed to the United States that military action conducted on false pretences against Syria, where Russian troops are deployed at the request of its legitimate Government, could have extremely serious repercussions. We urge Western politicians to temper their hawkish rhetoric, seriously consider the possible repercussions and cease their feeble, foolhardy efforts, which merely produce challenges to global security. We can see very good examples of what becomes of the military misadventures of the West in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya. No one has invested Western leaders with the power to take on the roles of the world's policeman and its investigators, prosecutors, judges and executioners as well. We urge them to return to the world of legality, comply with the Charter of the United Nations and work collectively to address the problems that arise rather than attempting to realize its own selfish geopolitical dreams at every step. All our energy should be focused on supporting the political process in Syria, and for that, all stakeholders with influence must unite in a

constructive effort. Russia is always ready for that kind of cooperation.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to request a briefing of the Security Council on the results of the United Nations assessment mission in Raqqa and on the situation in the Rukban camp. We can see how the coalition members are trying to complicate a resolution of the problems resulting from their actions in Syria, particularly the carpet-bombing operation designed to wipe out Raqqa. No chemical provocations will distract our attention from that issue.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): We thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Deputy High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Thomas Markram for their briefings.

Only five days ago, here in this Chamber (see S/PV.8221), we mourned as we remembered the sarin attack at Khan Shaykhun that occurred a year ago. This weekend another devastating gas attack was carried out in the city of Douma, killing more than 45 civilians and injuring more than 500. It was another in a series of chemical-weapon attacks in Syria. That is unacceptable. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is one of nine Security Council members that requested today's emergency meeting because we all believed that it was critically important to address this horrific attack. We must reinstate the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons. We must underscore the basic norms of the international legal order and stop the ongoing tragedy in eastern Ghouta and Douma.

We almost met twice today because one permanent member of the Council seemed not to want a focused discussion on the issue at hand, the chemical attack in Douma. That begs the question of whether that particular member State would prefer the international community to stand by and watch like a spectator while it covers for the crimes of its ally, the Syrian regime, some of which amount to serious war crimes. The Council must not stand idly by. It is high time for us to act in three ways, condemning, protecting and holding to account. First, today we should condemn in the strongest possible terms any use of chemical weapons. International law has been trampled on. Silence and impunity are not an option. However, condemnation alone is not enough.

Secondly, we must deliver on our responsibility to protect. The protection of civilians must remain an absolute priority. We call on the Astana guarantors to use their influence to prevent any further attacks. They must ensure a cessation of hostilities and a de-escalation of the violence, as per resolution 2401 (2018). An immediate ceasefire is needed in Douma so that humanitarian and medical aid can reach the victims of the attack and so that humanitarian personnel can continue their life-saving work. We owe it to the men, women and children of Douma and of Syria. We owe it to our own citizens.

Furthermore, the Kingdom of the Netherlands would also like to point out that the majority of the States Members of the United Nations count on the permanent members of the Council not to use their veto in cases of mass atrocities. The international community should be able to count on the Council to uphold international humanitarian law and the international prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and to act when international law is trampled. Let me be clear. We support the humanitarian work of the White Helmets. They do extremely important humanitarian work for civilians in Syria in dire circumstances.

Thirdly, all members of the Council regularly stress the importance of accountability for perpetrators who use chemical weapons. Yet the Council has not been able to move forward on that issue for months owing to one permanent member's use of the veto. We have been unable to tackle this crisis because one permanent member is a direct party to the conflict and has proved that it will defend the Syrian regime at all costs. We must intensify our efforts to establish a mechanism that can continue the meticulous work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and investigate and identify perpetrators independently of the politics in the Council. The JIM has identified both the Syrian regime and a non-State actor as responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. As I said last week (see S/PV.8221), the discontinuation of the JIM mandate cannot be the end of the story — all the more so because since the JIM ceased to operate, we have received reports that the regime has carried out at least six more chemical-weapon attacks and perhaps even more. For those who claim that chemical-weapon attacks have not taken place or that such accounts have been fabricated, I have a clear message. The establishment of an effective, impartial and independent attribution and accountability mechanism must not be vetoed.

Let us not forget that the United Nations is bigger than the Council alone. We have strong leadership at the helm of Organization and a powerful General

Assembly. Both must consider all instruments to advance accountability for the use of chemical weapons. The work should build on the important work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission and the JIM. We welcome the Fact-finding Mission's immediate investigation of the terrible incident in Douma this weekend. It should be given full access and cooperation by all parties. We reiterate our strong support for, first, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011; secondly, the Commission of Inquiry; thirdly, the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, initiated by France; and fourthly, a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court in The Hague as the most appropriate path to accountability and justice.

In conclusion, the Council must act. The OPCW Fact-finding Mission must complete an investigation as soon as possible, and there can be no impunity for the use of chemical weapons. To do otherwise is tantamount to condoning such appalling attacks, failing in our responsibilities and undermining the international architecture that we have collectively designed to stop such attacks. It is time for the Council and the international community as a whole to act.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Markram for their briefings.

Almost exactly one year ago, I stood on the floor of the Security Council and held up pictures of dead Syrian children (see S/PV.7915). After that day, I prayed that I would never have to do that again. I could; there are many truly gruesome pictures. Many of us have worked hard to ensure that one day we would not have to see images of babies gassed to death in Syria. However, the day we prayed would never come, has come again. Chemical weapons have once again been used on Syrian men, women and children. And once again, the Security Council is meeting in response.

This time I am not going to hold up pictures of victims. I could; there are many, and they are gruesome. Worse are the videos imprinted in our minds that no one should ever have to see. I could hold up pictures of babies lying dead next to their mothers, brothers and sisters — even toddlers and infants still in diapers, all lying together dead. Their skin is the ashen blue that is now tragically familiar from chemical-weapon scenes. Their eyes are open and lifeless, with white foam bubbles at their mouths and noses. They are pictures of dead Syrians who are unarmed, not soldiers and fit the very definition of innocent and non-threatening. Rather, they are women and children who were hiding in basements from a renewed assault by Bashar Al-Assad. They are of families who were hiding underground to escape Al-Assad's conventional bombs and artillery, but the basements that Syrian families thought would shelter them from conventional bombs were the worst place to be when chemical weapons fell from the sky. Saturday evening, the basements of Douma became their tombs.

It is impossible to know for certain how many have died, because access to Douma is cut off by Al-Assad's forces. Dozens are dead that we know of, and hundreds are wounded. I could hold up pictures of survivors — children with burning eyes and choking for breath. I could hold up pictures of first responders washing the chemicals off of the victims and putting respirators on children, or of first responders walking through room after room of families lying motionless with babies still in the arms of their mothers and fathers. I could show pictures of a hospital attacked with chemical weapons. I could show pictures of hospitals struck by barrel bombs following the chemical attack. Ambulances and rescue vehicles have been repeatedly attacked, maximizing the number of dead civilians. Civil defence centres have been attacked in order to paralyse the medical response so as to increase the suffering of the survivors. Who does that? Only a monster does that. Only a monster targets civilians, and then ensures that there are no ambulances to transfer the wounded, no hospitals to save their lives and no doctors or medicine to ease their pain.

I could hold up pictures of all of that killing and suffering for the Council to see, but what would be the point? The monster who was responsible for those attacks has no conscience, not even to be shocked by pictures of dead children. The Russian regime, whose hands are all covered in the blood of Syrian children, cannot be ashamed by pictures of its victims. We have tried that before. We must not overlook Russia and Iran's roles in enabling the Al-Assad regime's murderous destruction. Russia and Iran have military advisers at Al-Assad's airfields and operation centres. Russian officials are on the ground helping direct the

regime's starve-and-surrender campaign, and Iranian allied forces do much of the dirty work.

When the Syrian military pummels civilians, they rely on the military hardware given by Russia. Russia could stop that senseless slaughter if it wanted, but it stands with the Al-Assad regime and supports without any hesitation. What is the point of trying to shame such people? After all, no civilized Government would have anything to do with Al-Assad's murderous regime. Pictures of dead children mean little to Governments like Russia, who expend their own resources to prop up Al-Assad.

The Council, which saw the pictures last year, has failed to act because Russia has stood in its way every single time. For a year we have allowed Russia to hold the lives of innocent Syrians hostage to its alliance with the Al-Assad regime. That also allowed Russian to weaken the credibility of the United Nations. We are quick to condemn chemical weapons in the Security Council, but then Russia prevents any action. It vetoed five draft resolutions on this issue alone and used 11 vetoes all together to save Al-Assad. Our lives go on as usual.

The Council created the Joint Investigative Mechanism. It found the Syrian regime responsible for the attack at Khan Shaykhun a year ago. Because Russia supported Al-Assad and his actions, Russia killed the Mechanism. We condemned it, and our lives went on as usual. We pushed for a ceasefire. The Council unanimously agreed, but it was immediately ignored by Russia and Al-Assad. We condemned it, and our lives went on as usual. Now here we are, confronted with the consequences of giving Russia a pass in the name of unity — a unity that Russia has shown many times before it does not want. Here we are, in a world where chemical-weapons use is becoming normalized — from an Indonesian airport to an English village to the homes and hospitals of Syria. Since the Al-Assad regime used chemical weapons at Khan Shaykhun one year ago, chemical weapons have been reportedly used dozens of times, and the Council does nothing.

What we are dealing with today is not about a spat between the United States and Russia. It is about the inhumane use of chemical agents on innocent civilians. Each and every one of the nations in the Council is on record opposing the use of chemical weapons. There can be no more rationalizations for our failure to act. We have already introduced and circulated to the Council a draft resolution demanding unrestricted humanitarian access to the people of Douma. Al-Assad is doing all he can to assure maximum suffering in Douma. Our priority must be to help the starving, the sick and the injured who have been left behind. We also call on the Council to immediately re-establish a truly professional and impartial mechanism for chemical-weapons attacks in Syria, including the attack this weekend. We hope that our colleagues on the Council will join us, as they have before.

That is a very minimum we can do in response to the attack we just witnessed. Russia's obstructionism will not continue to hold us hostage when we are confronted with an attack like that one. The United States is determined to see the monster who dropped chemical weapons on the Syrian people held to account. Those present have heard what the President of the United States has said about that. Meetings are ongoing. Important decisions are being weighed, even as we speak. We are on the edge of a dangerous precipice. The great evil of chemical-weapons use, which once unified the world in opposition, is on the verge of becoming the new normal. The international community must not let that happen. We are beyond showing pictures of dead babies. We are beyond appeals to conscience. We have reached the moment when the world must see justice done. History will record this as the moment when the Security Council either discharged its duty or demonstrated its utter and complete failure to protect the people of Syria. Either way, the United States will respond.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Peruvian presidency for having convened this emergency Security Council meeting, at the request of France, together with eight other Council members. I also wish to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Thomas Markram, for their insightful briefings.

There are times in the lives of nations where what is essential is at stake: life or death; peace or war; civilization or barbarism; the international order or chaos. That is the case today following the dreadful chemical carnage that once again pushed the boundaries of horror on Saturday in Douma. We are aware that two new and particularly serious chemical-weapons attacks took place in Douma on 7 April. The provisional toll of human life is appalling. There are nearly 50 dead, including a number of children, and 1,000 wounded.

That toll is likely to be even higher, as assistance cannot reach some areas. Once again, toxic substances have been dropped to asphyxiate, to kill and to terrorize civilians, reaching them even in the basements where they sought refuge. Chlorine gas has the particular characteristic of being a heavy gas, capable of entering basements. For that reason, it is used. That is the level of deadly cynicism that has been reached in Syria.

There are no words to describe the horror of the images that surfaced on 7 April, nearly one year after the Khan Shaykhun attack, which killed nearly 80 people. What we see in the thousands of photos and videos that surfaced in the course of several hours after the 7 April attacks reminds us of the images we have seen far too often: children and adults suffocating due to exposure to concentrated chlorine gas. What we also see are people suffering from violent convulsions, excessive salivation and burning eyes, all of which are symptomatic of exposure to a potent neurotoxin mixed with chlorine to heighten the lethal effect. As I mentioned, in total more than 1,000 people were exposed to that deadly chemical compound.

The experience and the successive reports of the Joint Investigative Mechanism leave no room for doubt as to the perpetrators of this most recent attack. Only the Syrian armed forces and their agencies have the requisite knowledge to develop such sophisticated toxic substances with such a high degree of lethality. And only the Syrian armed forces and its agencies have a military interest in their use. This attack took place in Douma, an area that has been subjected to relentless shelling by the Syrian armed and air forces for several weeks. Unfortunately, the use of such weapons enables much swifter tactical progress than conventional weapons.

We are all aware that the Syrian regime has already been identified by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism as the party responsible for the use, on at least four occasions, of chlorine and sarin gas as a chemical weapon. There are no illusions as to the sincerity of the declaration delivered by Syria on the state of its chemical stockpiles in 2013. Unfortunately, we once again we have proof in the form of empirical evidence. This dovetails with the regime's strategy of terror against civilians. We have already experienced this. At the worst, this is bad faith or, even worse, complicity. The Damascus regime clearly seeks, by sowing terror, to accelerate the capture of other urban areas that it wishes to control. What could be more effective to prompt those who resist the regime to flee than sieges, a tactic worthy of the Middle Ages, in addition to chemical terror. Let us make no mistake: the children frozen in an agonizing death are not so-called collateral victims. They are deliberate targets of these chemical attacks, designed and planned for the purpose of waging terror. The Damascus regime is conducting State terrorism, with its litany of war crimes and even crimes against humanity.

The offensive and the shelling conducted by the regime, as well as by its Russian and Iranian allies, over the past 48 hours prove the degree to which they have engaged in a military race without any consideration of the human cost. This latest escalation of violence, punctuated by a new instance of the use of chemical weapons, brings us face to face with the destructive madness of a diehard regime that seeks to destroy its people completely. And that regime's Russian and Iranian allies are either unable or unwilling to stop it. We are aware of the fact, and the Russian authorities have confirmed this on several occasions, that Russian military forces have a presence on the ground and in the air in eastern Ghouta. On 7 April, as the second chemical attack took place in Douma, Russian aircraft were also taking part in air operations in the Damascus region. Russian and Iranian military support is present on the ground and at all levels of the Syrian war machinery. No Syrian aircraft takes off without the Russian ally being informed. These attacks took place either with the tacit or explicit consent of Russia or despite its reluctance and military presence. I do not know which is more alarming when it comes to our collective security.

The stakes revolving around this recent attack are extremely grave. This is the latest proof of the normalization of chemical weapons use, which we should attribute not only to a regime that has become uncontrollable and continues to gas civilians with complete impunity, but also to its supporters, including a permanent member of the Security Council. That member failed in its commitment to implement resolution 2118 (2013), which it, itself, co-sponsored. That member's responsibility in the endless tragedy that is the war in Syria is overwhelming.

France therefore of course turns towards Russia today in order to put forward two demands. The first demand is a cessation of hostilities and the establishment of an immediate ceasefire in Syria, in line with resolution 2401 (2018), adopted on 24 February,

which to date has never been upheld by the Damascus regime. France deeply deplores the fact that, although it was unanimously adopted, it was not possible to implement that resolution, which provides for a truce and emergency humanitarian access. The second demand is the establishment of a new international investigative mechanism that will be able to document all of the factors of the attack in Douma and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. The end of the Joint Investigative Mechanism last November due to two successive Russian vetoes has stripped us of an essential tool of deterrence. For that reason, we support any initiative to bridge that gap. And in that spirit France has committed to a partnership to combat impunity for the use of chemical weapons. In that same spirit, we endorse the draft resolution that has been put forward today by the United States.

With this attack the Al-Assad regime is testing yet again the determination of the international community to ensure compliance with the prohibition against chemica-weapons use. Our response must be united, robust and implacable. That response must make it clear that the use of chemical weapons against civilians will no longer be tolerated, and that those who flout that fundamental rule of our collective security will be held accountable and must face the consequences. The Al-Assad regime needs to hear an international response, and France stands ready to fully shoulder its role alongside its partners.

Ultimately, we know that only an inclusive political solution will bring an end to the seven-year conflict, which has claimed the lives of 500,000 people and pushed millions to take the route of exile. That is why France will remain fully committed alongside the United Nations Special Envoy and in line with the Geneva process. However, in the light of this most recent carnage, we can no longer merely repeat words. Without being followed up by deeds, such words would be meaningless. I wish to reiterate here what President Macron has stressed on several occasions: France will assume its full responsibility in the fight against the proliferation of chemical weapons. France's position is clear. It will uphold its commitments and keep its word.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria and Mr. Markram for their briefings. I also thank all the United Nations teams on the ground for the important and incredibly difficult work they do.

As Staffan de Mistura said, this is an important Security Council meeting. My Government shares the outrage that other colleagues have eloquently described today. It is truly horrific to think of victims and families sheltered underground when the chlorine found them.

This is the third time in five days that the Council has convened to discuss chemical weapons. This is dreadful in the true sense of that word. The Council should dread what we risk happening — for chemical weapons to become a routine part of fighting. As one of the five permanent members of the Council (P-5), the United Kingdom believes that we have a particular responsibility to uphold the worldwide prohibition on the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). We agree with the Netherlands Ambassador that the P-5 has specific responsibilities. I believe that four members of the P-5 do believe that, but there is one that does not. The Russian Ambassador referred to a resurgence of the Cold War. This is not the Cold War. In the Cold War there was not this flagrant disregard for the prohibitions that are universal on the use of WMDs.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General also referred to the risks of escalation, and to international peace and security more broadly. We share his fears, but it is the Syrian Government and its backers, Iran and Russia, who are prolonging the fighting and risking regional and wider instability. There are real questions about what is happening in the T-4 airbase, with its foreign fighters and its mercenaries.

We have been challenged today by our Russian colleague to say why we believe the attack was carried out by Syria and why we believe, further, that chemical weapons were used. The reasons are as follows. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism found six uses of chemical weapons between 2014 and 2017. Two it ascribed to Da'esh for the use of mustard gas, three it ascribed to the regime for the use of chlorine and one further use it ascribed to the Syrian regime for the use of sarin. That is the attacks that we talked about in the Council just last week at Khan Sheykhoun, which led to the United States strike — which we support — on Al-Shayrat. In addition, as the French Ambassador has said, we had reports of Russian and Syrian warnings before the chemical-weapon attack took place and of a pattern of Mi-8 Hip helicopters flying overhead. Those reports have come from the ground.

I listened carefully to the Russian Ambassador's argument. As I have just set out, we, as the United Kingdom believe that the Syrian regime is responsible for these latest attacks. But there is one way to settle this — to have an independent fact-finding mission followed by an independent investigation — as we all know that fact-finding missions are there to determine whether chemical weapons have been used and, if they have been used, what sort of chemical weapons. But only an investigation can determine who is responsible for their use, and therefore start the path to accountability.

I was very interested to hear the Russian offer that an OPCW fact-finding mission could visit and would have the protection of Russian forces. I believe that this is an offer worth pursuing, but it would, of course, be necessary for the OPCW mission to have complete freedom of action and freedom of access. That still leaves us with the question of who committed these atrocities. That is why we support the United States text for a draft resolution and we believe that there is no legitimate reason not to support the call for the Council to set up an independent investigative mechanism. As I said before, we have nothing to hide, but it appears that Russia, Syria and their supporters, Iran, do have something to fear.

The Russian Ambassador singled out the United Kingdom, the United States and France for criticism. I would like, if I may, to turn to that. The responsibility for the cruelty in Syria belongs to Syria and its backers — Russia and Iran. The use of chemical weapons is an escalatory and diabolical act. It strikes me that what Russia is trying to do is to turn the debate in the Council away from the discussion of the use of chemical weapons into a dispute between East and West, presenting itself as the victim. It is far too important to play games with the politics between East and West in respect of chemical weapons. Russia's crocodile tears for the people of eastern Ghouta has an easy answer. It is to join us in the non-political attempt to get in humanitarian and protection workers from the United Nations to do their job of looking after and mitigating the risk to civilians. Russia's concern about attribution for the use of chemical weapons also has an easy answer. It is to join us in allowing the United Nations to set up an international investigative mechanism to pursue the responsible parties. I repeat here the two demands of my French colleague, and I hope we will be able to make progress.

I had not intended to address the Skripal case in Salisbury, but since my Russian colleague has done so, I will address it today. He asked what the similarities were between Salisbury and Syria. I think it is important that I point out that the cases are different in the following respects. First, there is a thorough investigation under way in Salisbury. As we have heard, there is no investigation under way in Syria. The British Government in Salisbury is seeking to protect its people, as is its duty. The Syrian Government, on the contrary, as we have heard today, attacks and gasses its people. I am sorry to say that what the two do have in common though, is Russia's refusal to assume P-5 responsibilities to prevent the use of WMDs and its reckless support for the use of WMDs by its agents and by its allies.

It is not we who want to alienate Russia. It alienates herself by not joining in the vast majority of the Council who wish to find a non-polemical way through and to address the use of chemical weapons against civilians in Syria. The Russian Ambassador mentioned friends of the United States. My Government and its people are proud to be a friend of the United States. We stand with everyone on the Council who wants to find a way through the chemical weapons problem, to have a proper fact-finding mission and to have a proper investigation as the first step to bringing this dreadful conflict to a close.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to thank Special Envoy de Mistura and the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Markram, for their briefings. China takes note of the reports alleging that chemical weapons were once again used in Syria and caused civilian casualties. That is of great concern to China.

China's position on chemical-weapons has been consistent and clear. We are firmly opposed to the use of chemical weapons by any State, organization or individual under any circumstances. Any use of chemical weapons, whenever and wherever, must not be tolerated. China supports a comprehensive, objective and impartial investigation of the incident concerned so that it can reach a conclusion based on substantiated evidence that can stand the test of history and facts so that the perpetrators and responsible parties can be brought to justice.

The Syrian chemical-weapons issue is closely linked to to a political settlement of the Syrian situation. China

supports the ongoing important role of the Security Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as the main channels for dealing with the Syrian chemical-weapons issue. We hope that the parties concerned will take a constructive approach so as to seek a solution through consultations, establish the facts, prevent any further use of chemical weapons, preserve the unity of the Security Council and cooperate with the efforts by the parties concerned to advance the political process in Syria.

The Syrian conflict has entered its eighth year and is inflicting tremendous suffering on the Syrian people. A political settlement is the only solution to the Syrian issue. The international community must remain committed to a political settlement of the question of Syria, while fully respecting its sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

China has always opposed the use or threat of force in international affairs. We always advocate adherence to the Charter of the United Nations. All parties should increase their support for the United Nations mediation efforts and compel the parties in Syria to seek a political settlement under the principle of Syrian leadership and ownership in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

The fight against terrorism is an important and urgent issue in the political settlement of the Syrian question. The international community must strengthen its coordination, uphold uniform standards and combat all terrorist groups identified as such by the Security Council.

At a recent Security Council meeting, China set out its principled position with regard to the Skripal incident (see S/PV.8224). China believes that the parties concerned should strictly comply with their obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and, in line with the relevant provisions of the Convention, carry out a comprehensive, impartial and objective investigation and deal with the issues concerned within the framework of the OPCW. China hopes that the parties concerned will work in accordance with the principles of mutual respect and equality, engage in consultations, cooperate, avoid politicization and measures that might further exacerbate tensions and resolve their differences properly through dialogue.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. Thomas Markram for their briefings this afternoon. I would also like to thank you, Mr. President, for acceding to our request for an emergency meeting.

We are dismayed by the general escalation of violence in Syria, as described today by Staffan de Mistura, in clear violation of the various resolutions, including resolution 2401 (2018). In that regard, I want to plea with the Syrian authorities represented in the Chamber and with the Astana guarantors to live up to the Security Council's resolutions.

We asked for this meeting today because over the weekend we were yet again faced with horrifying allegations of chemical-weapons attacks in Syria, this time in Douma, just outside Damascus. There are worrying reports of a large number of civilian casualties, including women and children. The graphic material that has been shared is beyond repugnant. We are alarmed by those extremely serious allegations. There must now be an immediate, independent and thorough investigation.

Let me reiterate that Sweden supports all international efforts to combat the use and proliferation of chemical weapons by State or non-State actors anywhere in the world. We unequivocally condemn in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons, including in Syria. It is a serious violation of international law and constitutes a threat to international peace and security. The use of chemical weapons in armed conflict is always prohibited and amounts to a war crime. Those responsible must be held accountable. We cannot accept impunity.

Addressing the use of chemical weapons in Syria has become a central test of the credibility of the Council. How we respond to the most recent reports from Douma is therefore decisive. Despite the odds, we must put aside our differences and come together. Now is the time to show unity. In our view, the following needs to happen.

First, we must condemn in the strongest terms the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Secondly, our immediate priority must be to investigate the worrying reports from Douma. In that context, we welcome the announcement by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that the Fact-finding Mission for Syria — to which we reiterate our full support — is in the process of gathering information from all available sources. We express our hope that the Fact-finding Mission can be urgently deployed to Syria.

Thirdly, all States, as well as the parties to the conflict, including the Syrian authorities, must fully cooperate with the Fact-finding Mission. What is particularly needed is safe and unhindered access to the site in Douma, as well as any information and evidence deemed relevant by the Fact-finding Mission to conduct its independent investigation.

Fourthly, we need to urgently redouble our efforts in the Council to agree on a new independent and impartial attributive mechanism to identify those responsible for chemical-weapons use.

Finally, if the allegations of chemical-weapons use are indeed confirmed and those responsible are eventually identified, the perpetrators must be held to account.

We are ready to work actively and constructively with other members for urgent Council action. To that end, we have circulated elements as input to our discussions. We must immediately engage in consultations in order to break the current deadlock and to shoulder our responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations. We owe that to the many victims of the crimes committed in this conflict.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): Allow me to thank Special Envoy Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Mr. Thomas Markham for their important briefings.

We are horrified by the news of another deadly attack in eastern Ghouta, which took place on Saturday evening. Dozens of people perished as a result of a vicious act of violence against civilians in Douma. The available information about the symptoms of the victims affirm that they are consistent with those caused by a chemical agent.

Poland condemns that barbaric attack, and expects that it will be possible to hold the perpetrators accountable. No military or political goal can justify the extermination of innocent vulnerable people, especially those seeking help in medical facilities. That atrocious crime seems to be a cynical response to the debates in the Council last week, when we commemorated the first anniversary of the attack in Khan Shaykun (see S/PV.8221).

We call on the actors affecting the situation in Syria, especially the Russian Federation and Iran, to take all the necessary actions to prevent any further use of weapons of mass destruction and to achieve the full cessation of hostilities in the whole territory of Syria. We insist that all parties to the conflict comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

As has been stated many times by members of the Council, as well as United Nations officials and European Union representatives, it is highly regrettable that the renewal of the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism was vetoed, thereby allowing those responsible for the subsequent chemical attacks to remain unpunished. Today we face the results of that impunity, witnessing further attacks against civilians with the use of chemicals as weapons.

We urge all our partners in the Council to engage in a serious discussion in good faith in order to re-establish an accountability mechanism for chemical attacks in Syria. That is the minimum that we owe the victims of Ghouta, Khan Shaykun, Al-Lataminah and the numerous other places where chemical weapons have been used.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We would like to thank Special Envoy De Mistura and Mr. Thomas Markram for their briefings.

Reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma on Saturday and the videos and pictures that we saw through media outlets are indeed very worrisome. It is also deeply disturbing that such reports of the use of chemical weapons have continued in the ongoing military activities in Syria. As we have repeatedly stated, we strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons by any actor under any circumstances. There is no justification whatsoever for the use of chemical weapons. Those responsible for these inhuman acts must be identified and held accountable. This is absolutely vital, not only for the sake of the victims of chemical weapons in Syria but also for maintaining international peace and security and for preserving the non-proliferation architecture.

As the Secretary-General said in his 8 April statement, cited by the Special Envoy earlier, any use of chemical weapons, if confirmed, is abhorrent and requires a thorough investigation. That includes the need to establish accountability — something on which the Council has yet to achieve consensus. In the meantime, we believe the reported use of chemical weapons in Douma, and in other parts of Syria, should be investigated by the Fact-finding Mission, and all parties should extend full cooperation in that

regard, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

While we all agree that accountability is indispensable for deterring and stopping the use of chemical weapons in Syria and beyond, there is currently, as has already be said, no independent, impartial and professional investigative mechanism that could identify those individuals, entities, State or non-State actors that use chemical weapons in the country. In that regard, the Council should recover its unity and engage in a positive and constructive discussion that could address the existing institutional lacunae.

We all know that the threats to international peace and security we face today are becoming increasingly more complex by the day. We are seeing that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is posing a real danger and that the international norms on the use of chemical weapons are also being undermined. Since the end of the Cold War, the trust among major Powers has never been so low as it is currently, which has enormous implications not only for global peace and security but also for the transformative agenda that we have set for ourselves in the development sphere. We cannot think of making any meaningful headway towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals without creating the necessary global security environment. At the moment, we really cannot say that this is an environment conducive to making any progress on that account.

The Security Council has the primary responsibility for the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security. Unfortunately, it has not been able to effectively address the new and emerging threats and challenges to peace and security that we are facing today. It has been all the more apparent that the lack of unity and cohesion among members is undermining the credibility of the Council. Perhaps we, the elected members, have to look for ways and means to have a greater impact, with a view to contributing to increasing the Council's effectiveness. Without dialogue among the major Powers to build the necessary trust and understanding, it will be extremely difficult to address some of the most difficult and complex security challenges we have ever seen, including the situation in Syria.

Things are in fact bound to get even worse unless something is done. We cannot afford to bury our heads in the sand. The dangers are very palpable. That is why every opportunity should be seized. That is also why we consider the news about the upcoming summit-level meetings being planned to be encouraging. We can only hope that those meetings will help to defuse tensions and allow for serious discussions to take place with a view to finding a common approach to tackling current threats and challenges. The sooner those discussions happen, the better for preserving global peace and stability, which, as we speak, is becoming a source of extremely great concern. In fact, I am understating the magnitude of the potential danger we are facing.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): The Ivorian delegation thanks Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Markram for their respective briefings on the latest developments in Syria, after the resumption of fighting in Douma and eastern Ghouta and the bombing of the city of Damascus, following the relative calm of recent weeks. My delegation would like to focus its statement on three main points.

First, we remain deeply concerned about recent reports of chemical-weapons attacks against innocent civilian populations, which have reportedly resulted in numerous casualties who have shown symptoms of exposure to a chemical agent. While reaffirming its categorical rejection of any use or resort to chemical weapons, be it in times of peace or in times of war, Côte d'Ivoire strongly condemns such acts and calls for these events to be placed under an intense spotlight, with the contribution of all stakeholders.

In the face of allegations of recurrent use of chemical weapons by the warring parties in the Syrian conflict, the Ivorian delegation stresses that it is more important than ever that the international community send a strong signal to show, beyond the usual principled condemnations, its determination to put a definitive end to this infernal cycle.

The use of chemical weapons violates the most fundamental norms of international law and poses threats to our collective security. That is why we must engage in a unflagging fight against impunity in the use of chemical weapons and preserving the international chemical non-proliferation regime, which is one of the fundamental pillars of our common security.

My second point concerns the need for the international community to put in place a mechanism for accountability and for the fight against impunity for those who use chemical weapons, in order to put an end to the repeated use of these weapons. In that regard, the Ivorian delegation expresses its readiness to work

towards the establishment of such a mechanism and calls on the Council to return to the unity it had when it established the Joint Investigative Mechanism, whose mandate unfortunately could not be renewed despite our common efforts.

Thirdly, Côte d'Ivoire notes with regret that resolution 2401 (2018), which remains the framework for our joint action, has not been implemented and that the humanitarian situation in Syria has further deteriorated. In the light of the distress of the civilian populations trapped in the fighting, the urgency for a cessation of hostilities remains more relevant than ever. In the face of the deteriorating situation, my country would like once again to call on all parties to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities and to respect international humanitarian law, including unhindered humanitarian access to persons in distress, in accordance with resolution 2401 (2018).

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its conviction that the solution to the crisis in Syria cannot be military. Only an inclusive political process can put a definitive end to this conflict. Such a political solution must be in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and imbued with the results of the Geneva negotiations. My country believes that the Geneva talks remain the right framework for achieving a lasting solution to the Syrian conflict.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. Thomas Markram and their respective teams for their exhaustive briefings.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea expresses its gratitude to the French Republic and to the other members of the Council that called for the convening of this afternoon's meeting. We also thank the President of the Security Council for having decided to hold this afternoon's meeting under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security: The situation in the Middle East". This is an appropriate topic, since recent events in the Middle East represent a genuine threat to peace and security, not only in that region but at the international level as well. From the protests in the Gaza Strip, with their loss of human lives, to the missile attacks on Syria, as well as the horrendous chemical weapons attack in the Syrian town of Douma, those are all situations of deep concern for the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

This past weekend we awoke to news that added a new low to the saddest and bloodiest episodes of the Syrian conflict. According to reports published in the international media, on 7 April, in the Syrian town of Douma in eastern Ghouta, more than 40 people, mostly women and girls, died from asphyxiation caused by inhaling a poison gas.

As we heard in this Chamber on 4 April from the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Thomas Markram (see S/PV.8221), the conclusions and recommendations of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic are not binding and do not attribute responsibilities in the case of evidence of the use of chemical substances prohibited under the relevant international treaties. In the light of that fact, we take this opportunity to recall the obligation of all parties to take essential steps towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), and we underscore the need to establish an independent investigation mechanism of the United Nations whose task should be focused on preventing impunity, identifying those responsible and preventing future attacks to the best of its abilities.

As far as the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is concerned, no use of chemical weapons should go uninvestigated or unpunished. As a result, the alarming information coming out of Syria, especially that pertaining to the use of chemical weapons targeting civilians, both the case of Douma, which we are discussing today, as well as similar events in the past, must be investigated exhaustively, fairly, objectively and independently by international bodies in accordance with OPCW standards. The results of such investigations must be made public and those responsible must answer for their crimes before the implacable face of justice.

The fact that chemical substances continue to be used, especially against civilians, is cause for serious concern to the Government of Equatorial Guinea. During the general debate of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly, the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, His Excellency Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, condemned in the strongest terms the use, manufacture, possession and distribution of chemical weapons in armed conflicts (see A/72/PV.13). It is worth recalling that no member of the Council should be considered exempt from that obligation, which also reflects Chapter I of the Charter of the

United Nations, which enshrines the determination of Member States to build a world of peace and ensure the well-being of humankind.

The Security Council now finds itself at a crossroads with respect to its options. It can either strengthen the presence of international forces with a view to future military intervention, as some military Powers have been suggesting, or we can pursue international negotiations, be they in Geneva, Astana, Sochi or Ankara. However, history continues to teach us that military interventionism has never resolved conflicts; rather, it exacerbates and entrenches them, sowing desolation and ruin in its wake.

As far as the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is concerned, the only solution to the Syrian conflict is to be found in the words spoken yesterday by Pope Francis in the traditional Sunday mass in Saint Peter's Square in the Vatican:

> "There is no such thing as a good war and a bad war. Nothing, but nothing, can justify the use of such instruments of extermination on defenseless people and populations ... military and political leaders choose another path, that of negotiations, which is the only one that can bring about peace and not death and destruction."

In conclusion, we reiterate the appeal made by the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to the countries and actors with influence in Syria, as well as in Israel and Palestine, to wield that influence in order to force all parties involved in those conflicts to mitigate the suffering of their people and to sit down to negotiate to put an end to that chronic threat to international peace and security which persists in the Middle East.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Deputy High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Thomas Markram, for their briefings. We express our gratitude to Council members for initiating this emergency meeting, which we hope will lead to the launching of a timely and objective investigation of the incident in Douma.

We firmly believe that the Security Council remains the main and sole body authorized to counter threats to international peace and security. Unfortunately, the situation within the Council is becoming increasingly strained. In order to achieve an appropriate solution to these critical issues, it is of utmost importance that the Council act unanimously, in a balanced and pragmatic manner. To that end, we must demonstrate greater flexibility and negotiability, rising above our national interests in order to achieve peace and stability. Any controversy that involves prejudices and mutual accusations and lacks conclusive results and irrefutable evidence will have only a destructive effect and will not lead to the results that the world community expects from us.

With regard to the chemical attacks in Syria, we mourn together with the families of those killed and express our solidarity with them in the face of such atrocities, by which innocent civilians become victims of the relentless confrontation of the opposing parties. Kazakhstan has always taken a firm and resolute stand, uncompromisingly condemning any use of chemical weapons as the most heinous action and an unacceptable war crime.

With regard to the situation in Douma, we call for an investigation into this alleged incident to be carried out and for all the circumstances to be clarified as soon as possible. The Council has the great responsibility to act on verifiable facts, not only before the world community, but before ourselves. Furthermore, history itself will ultimately be the judge of our decisions. Therefore, we need to verify all the details of the incident. In that regard, we would like to draw attention to the following aspects.

First, are there any other reliable sources, in addition to White Helmets' claims, and who can verify the veracity of the assessments and testimonies of those sources? Some claim that the number of victims is 70, while others report that there were more than 150 victims and still others believe there were only 25 victims. Even one victim is too many. However, today, the Russian Federation denied the attack altogether. There are many allegations and assumptions regarding the very facts concerning the use of a toxic chemical substance.

Secondly, we consider it important to take into account the fact that the Government of Syria has repeatedly notified us and requested that we check its reports that a number of terrorist groups on the side of the opposition were making attempts to transfer chemical weapons and prepare chemical attacks on the territory of eastern Ghouta. Actually, these allegations have not been given due attention and we have had no opportunity to verify all the facts. We are not advocating for any side in this conflict, but rather demanding a full

and objective investigation on the basis of which we can make a thoughtful decision.

Thirdly, we believe that it is imperative to conduct an independent investigation. We again recall the urgent need for an investigative mechanism, the establishment of which depends on the permanent members of the Council. They must make every possible effort to find common ground on the issue. We urgently need objective and verifiable information, as well as an immediate, independent, transparent and unbiased investigation before any decision or action, unilateral or otherwise, is taken.

We fully support the proposal that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission be sent at the earliest. We are certain that the Syrian people are very interested in an objective investigation. Therefore, Damascus and opposing parties should provide all assistance and secure access for the speedy visit of the OPCW inspectors to the incident sites to collect facts on the ground.

Finally, we again call for the preservation and strengthening of the unity of the Council to reach a consensus-based decision to preserve peace and stability in the world.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we thank you, Mr. President, for the prompt convening of today's meeting. We were one of the countries that requested it.

We also thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for their briefings.

Since the beginning of this year, the State of Kuwait has occupied the Arab seat in the Security Council. One of our most important priorities, which we made clear before we joined it, is to defend and uphold Arab issues, voice the concerns about them and work to find peaceful solutions. We deeply deplore the lack of any real and genuine progress on any of these issues, in particular that of the Syrian crisis, which regrettably continues to deteriorate. Security Council resolutions on such issues are not implemented. The Council is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security but is unable to shoulder that responsibility. It is divided as it faces those dangers and threats. Therefore the crises continue, along with the suffering of the people in the region.

The State of Kuwait condemns in the strongest terms the heinous rocket and barrel bomb attacks against residential areas under siege in eastern Ghouta, including the latest attack on Douma, on 7 April. Five days ago we marked the first anniversary of the Khan Shaykhun incident (see S/PV.8221), in which chemical weapons were used, as confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. It also identified who used them.

Two days ago, scores of civilians, including children and women, were killed or injured in attacks and air strikes against Douma. Many cases of asphyxiation were recorded. Several international reports confirmed that the crimes committed in both incidents were tantamount to crimes against humanity and war crimes, which reminds us once again of the request we all made in the Chamber for the establishment of a new mechanism to determine whether or not and by whom chemical weapons had been used, and to hold the perpetrators in Syria accountable. The mechanism must guarantee impartial, transparent and professional investigations in all chemical attacks in Syria in order to end impunity. For the past five years — specifically, since August 2013 — the perpetrators of chemical attacks in Syria have enjoyed impunity. They have not been punished, even when we witnessed the very first crime of the use of chemical weapons in eastern Ghouta.

We do not want to mark the first anniversary of the attack in Douma without a conviction. We call for the Council to establish an accountability mechanism that would determine the perpetrators of the chemical-weapons crimes anywhere in Syria — be they a Government, entity, group or individual — so that they can be held accountable in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2118 (2013). The Council must shoulder its responsibility with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security. The use of chemical weapons in Syria is a genuine threat to the non-proliferation regime. The continued attacks against civilians in medical facilities and residential areas, through air strikes or artillery, are all flagrant violations of the international community's will and relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2401 (2018), which demanded a 30-day ceasefire, at the very least, without delay.

The provisions of resolution 2118 (2013) are clear and definite. They call for accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, which is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. However, current events are a clear violation of the provisions of the resolution. As members of the Council, we cannot accept the status quo, which is the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria. It is another disappointment for the Syrian people, whose suffering caused by the use of such weapons in different parts of Syria we have been unable to end.

The Council has a collective responsibility. The suffering Syrian people are sick and tired of tuning into meetings of the Council without seeing tangible results on the ground. At several junctures throughout this bloody conflict the Council has been able to find common ground to end the crisis. However, we must overcome our political differences and establish a new accountability mechanism in Syria that is professional, credible and impartial. Such elements are available in the draft resolution under discussion, which has been put forward by the United States. It includes updates on the incident in Douma. We call on all members of the Council to build on that draft as a good basis for negotiations on a future mechanism.

We continue to seek a political solution as the only means to end the crisis in all its dimensions. The political road map is clear and agreed, based on the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and on resolution 2254 (2015). It seeks to maintain the unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria and meet the legitimate aspirations and ambitions of the Syrian people towards living a dignified life.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for their briefings.

We are deeply concerned about the reported use of chemical weapons in the city of Douma. Bolivia reiterates its condemnation of the use of chemical agents as weapons and considers it to be an unjustifiable criminal act. There can be no justification for their use, regardless of the circumstances or by whom they are used, as it constitutes a serious violation of international law and a grave threat to international peace and security.

We believe that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-finding Mission, in line with its mandate, should verify in the most objective, methodological and technical manner the reported use of chemical weapons. Should their use be verified, it must be investigated in an effective and transparent manner in order to ensure that the perpetrators can be identified and tried by the appropriate bodies so as to prevent impunity. We therefore need an independent, impartial and representative entity that will conduct a comprehensive, credible and conclusive investigation. Our major challenge is to ensure that we do not politicize or exploit the Security Council for our own purposes.

We regret that so far there have been obstacles to the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), and we call on all the parties involved to make every effort to effectively implement it throughout Syrian territory. We emphatically reject the ongoing bombardments and indiscriminate attacks, especially those on civilian infrastructure such as health facilities, and we deplore all military activity in residential areas. Such actions only cause more displacements, injuries and deaths. We call on all the parties to respect international humanitarian law and human rights law, including authorizing humanitarian access throughout Syria and to all persons in need, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We reiterate that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict and that the only option is an inclusive, negotiated and coordinated political process, led by the Syrian people for the Syrian people, aimed at enabling sustainable peace to be achieved in the area without any foreign pressure, as provided for in resolution 2254 (2015). We also reject any attempt at fragmentation or sectarianism in Syria.

Bolivia wants to once again make clear its firm rejection of the use of force or the threat of use of force. We also reject unilateral actions, which are illegal and contrary to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and undermine any effort to achieve a political solution.

Lastly, with regard to the events in the city of Salisbury, we reiterate the importance of conducting an independent, transparent and depoliticized investigation in accordance with current rules and regulations of international law, especially as set forth by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

We believe that cooperation among the relevant parties will be essential to making progress through the appropriate diplomatic channels in solving the crime and strengthening the non-proliferation regime.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

We thank Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Markram for their briefings. Peru is deeply concerned about the new reports of the use of chemical weapons against civilians in Syria, including minors, in the town of Douma. In that regard, we note the urgent need for a thorough investigation. Peru condemns any use of chemical weapons wherever it may take place. We want to point out that it is a heinous crime, a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security and a violation both of the non-proliferation regime and international humanitarian law.

In the short term, we believe that the Syrian Government and all parties to the conflict, including countries with influence on the ground, should abide by and implement the humanitarian ceasefire that the Council provided for in resolution 2401 (2018), and to cooperate with the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. To that end, we once again reiterate the importance of establishing an independent and impartial accountability mechanism. The investigations should result in the prosecution and punishment of those responsible. The members of the Council cannot permit impunity.

We must also remember that any response to the conflict in Syria and the atrocities committed there must be conducted in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Peru opposes any use or threat of use of force contrary to international law. We reiterate our deep concern about the serious consequences that the ongoing atrocities in the Syrian conflict may have for the stability of the Middle East and for an international order based on minimum standards of humanity and coexistence. In that regard, I would like to conclude by calling on the members of the Council to restore a sense of unity and the common good to our discharge of our high responsibilities. In the case of Syria, that means implementing the ceasefire and ensuring the effective protection of civilians, investigating and punishing atrocity crimes and resuming a serious process of political dialogue, based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), with a view to promoting the sustainable peace that the Syrian people so badly need.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Like my Dutch colleague and friend, I too have three points to make.

I would first like to respectfully request of my colleague Mrs. Nikki Haley, Permanent Representative of the United States, that from now on she refrain from labelling any legitimate Governments as "regimes". Right now I am referring specifically to Russia. I have made that request once before, but Ambassador Haley was not present, and I asked for it to be conveyed to her by her colleagues. Now I am requesting it personally. If it happens again, I will interrupt the meeting on a point of order.

Secondly, the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom said that Syria is different from Salisbury in that there no investigation is being conducted in Syria, while one is under way in Salisbury. We would very much like to know more about the details of that investigation and would be grateful if she could communicate them to us. However, for the time being we know nothing other than that all of a sudden the alleged victims of a chemical warfare agent, thankfully, turn out to be alive and, apparently, almost completely well. However, nobody has seen them yet, and we fear for the condition of those important witnesses. At the moment, we have learned from newspaper reports, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has offered to shelter the Skripals in the United States under new identities. The CIA's participation in this is itself revealing. But it also means that we may never see these people, who are key witnesses to what happened, again.

What else do we know? We know about the speedy euthanization of the Skripals' pets and the cremation of the cat and dead guinea pigs. We are also aware of the intention to demolish their house and the restaurant and pub they visited. We also know that Yulia Skripal's sister, Viktoria, who wanted to see her, was denied a British visa. Why? That is all we know. I repeat that we would very much like to learn more details about what is going on, and we would be grateful to our British

colleagues if they could keep us regularly informed during the investigation.

Thirdly, and lastly, we did not meet here today to address the situation in Douma. The agenda item is entitled "Threats to international peace and security", although, needless to say, it was the situation regarding Douma and the so-called chemical attack that prompted the meeting. In today's meeting, as Mr. De Mistura mentioned and the Secretary-General has previously discussed, we are moving towards a dangerous area. Unfortunately, the people who are playing these dangerous games and spewing irresponsible threats do not understand that. Today we heard once again what we have already heard many times. None of our Western colleagues want to hear or listen to objective information. None of them has expressed any doubts about the one and only version that has been given of what transpired. So what is the point of an investigation? Why bother? They have accused Damascus of a chemical-weapon attack not just before any investigation has been carried out but before the incident was even known about.

They are not convinced by the information that we have provided today. They simply do not want to listen. We have already said that there are no witnesses to the use of chemical weapons at all. There are no traces of chemicals, no bodies, no injuries, no poisoning victims. Nobody went to the hospital. The footage was all clearly staged by the White Helmets. We demand that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) mission immediately visit Douma and the area of the alleged chemical weapons attack, interview the residents and medical staff and and collect soil samples. My British colleague said that only an investigation can establish who is to blame. We agree, except that did not stop her from blaming the so-called Syrian regime. Those two things do not really jibe. We insist that the OPCW mission visit Douma immediately. The Syrian authorities and Russian troops are ready to provide the necessary conditions for this to take place.

Lastly, we too wish there were an independent investigative mechanism. I would like to remind the Council that our draft resolution, which includes a proposal for establishing such a mechanism, is in blue, and we are ready to adopt it today, if necessary.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I apologize for taking the floor again, but I want to clarify something. The Russian Ambassador's English is far too good for him not to have understood me when I spoke on 5 April (see S/PV.8224). The investigation of the Salisbury incident that is under way is an independent police investigation, and the United Kingdom will be very pleased to update the Council as and when we have something to say.

If I may, I would like to add one more thing. The other difference between Salisbury and Syria is that the United Kingdom is a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention in good standing, and the Syrian Government has not complied with its obligations as certified by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The American representative said that Russia spends its resources to support what she calls the regime in Syria. My question to her is: What does the United States spend its resources on in Syria? Does it spend its resources providing milk and medicine to Syrian children, or on providing weapons and munitions to its terrorist groups, which have committed the most heinous crimes against the Syrian people? Or is it spending resources on the its alliance's aircraft, which have wreaked destruction in many places in Syria, particularly in the city of Raqqa? What about the continuous threats that are made against my country at nearly every meeting of the Security Council on this issue? Does she acknowledge that her Administration has no respect for the Security Council, this international Organization or the principles of international law?

Let us test the credibility of what my colleague the United States Ambassador said. I ask members to note that I do not refer to the American Administration as the "American regime" because that would be legally shameful in this Chamber. Let us test the credibility of what my colleague the American Ambassador said when she asked the Security Council to act in order to achieve justice in Syria. Well, my test is to request that her Administration and her country allow the disclosure of the results of the United Nations Special Commission that investigated the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq for 18 years. The Commission was headed for some time by a Swede, Mr. Hans Blix.

As Council members know, after 18 years of investigation the Commission found no chemical weapons in Iraq. Nor did they find Coca-Cola or Pepsi Cola. Nevertheless, in a semi-confidential meeting towards the end of 2008, the Security Council decided to end the Commission's work and bury its archives in iron boxes. I repeat — it decided to bury its archives in iron boxes. Only the Secretary-General knows the code that opens those boxes. There was one condition, which was that the boxes could not be opened for 60 years. What is so shameful in those archives? Why did they have to be buried in boxes that cannot be opened for 60 years? That question is directed to the American Ambassador.

The Government of my country condemns in the strongest terms the ruthless Israeli aggression that took place this morning on the T-4 airbase in Homs governorate, in which a number of civilians were killed and injured. It was a flagrant violation of Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and of various Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism, and would not have occurred were it not for the American Administration's unlimited and consistent support for Israel. The American Administration guarantees Israel immunity so that it will not be held accountable in the Council. That allows Israel to continue to practice State terrorism and to threaten peace and security in the region and beyond. Of course, Western countries did not even mention the Israeli aggression in their statements today, which shows that the Governments of their countries are complicit in it and are covering for it. Unfortunately, my dear friend Mr. De Mistura did not hear Netanyahu say this morning that it was Israel that launched the attack. That is why I was surprised when he said that the United Nations has not been able to verify the identity of its perpetrators. If Netanyahu himself says that he launched this aggression, why does Mr. De Mistura not refer to Israel as the aggressor?

This Israeli aggression is an indirect response to the successes of the Syrian Arab Army in expelling armed terrorist groups from the suburbs of Damascus, its rural area and other Syrian territory. Those groups have been killing the Syrian people, kidnapping civilians, detaining them and using them as human shields. They targeted Damascus alone with 3,000 missiles over the course of three months, killing 155 martyrs and injuring 865 civilians, most of them women and children. The Syrian Government underscores that the repeated Israeli aggression did not and will not protect Israeli agents operating within terrorist groups, nor will it divert the attention of the Syrian Army from its decisive military achievements in combating terrorism.

The American anti-racism activist Martin Luther King Jr. said that "a lie is like a snowball: the further you roll it the bigger it becomes". It would seem that this wise saying holds true at any time and at any place. The Governments of some countries lie incessantly. Fortunately, though, they have not quite perfected the details of their web of lies, much like the famous Baron Munchausen of German literature. How many roosters truly believe that sunrise is the result of crowing?

Some permanent members have become professional liars, and that in itself is a weapon of mass destruction. Through their lies, Palestine was stolen. The lies of these countries fuelled the war in the Korean peninsula. Through their lies, they invaded Viet Nam. Through their lies, they invaded Grenada. Through their lies, they destroyed Yugoslavia. Through their lies, they occupied Iraq. Through their lies, they destroyed Libya. Through their lies, they created takfiri terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaida, the Taliban, Da'esh, Al-Nusra Front, Jaysh Al-Islam — and the list goes on and on. Through their lies, the same countries are trying to defeat Syria and prepare the ground for an assault today.

It is worth noting that the today's negative statement of the United States representative is in absolute contradiction with a statement made by United States Secretary of Defence General Mattis in an interview with *Newsweek* two days ago with journalist Ian Wilkie. Mr. Wilkie used the following title for the interview: "Now Mattis Admits There Was No Evidence Assad Used Poison Gas on His People." That was said by the American Defence Secretary, not the Syrian Defence Minister. What a harmonious Administration!

On 10 December 2012, some six years ago, we submitted a formal letter to the Council (S/2012/917), before the operators of terrorist groups claimed, for the first time, that sarin gas was used in Khan Al-Assal on 19 March 2013. We informed the Council that the United States, the United Kingdom and France had launched a campaign of allegations claiming that the Syrian Government may have used chemical weapons. Back then, we warned that such allegations would encourage Governments that sponsor terrorists to provide chemical weapons to armed terrorist groups and then claim that the Syrian Government had used such weapons. What happened in the past few years

in Khan Al-Assal, Ghouta, Kafr Zita, Lataminah, Tal Minis, Khan Shaykhun and many other villages and towns in Syria confirms unequivocally what we had warned of five to six years ago, and during all these six years.

The United States, the United Kingdom and France have been extremely eager to hold one meeting after another based on fabricated information. That is part of the deep crisis that we are witnessing. They want to involve other Council members in that crisis. Since 2013, those three countries have created a big elephant of lies and deceit in the Security Council. That elephant is living in the Chamber today and is stomping on the credibility of the Council with its huge feet. It seems that these countries called for the holding of today's meeting to support terrorists and to obstruct the agreement reached about Douma.

However, those countries were a bit late because the terrorists had hoped this meeting would be held before they were forced to reach an agreement with the Syrian State to leave their strongholds and hand over their weapons. These countries were late in fulfilling their promises to the terrorists. It would have been better not to repeat their nasty story and not to rely on false reports from mercenaries — so-called White Helmets, founded by British intelligence officer James Le Mesurier. He is British, but his name is French. What proves that these countries were lying is that the residents of Douma left the city safely — 170,000 civilians left the city safely. Those terrorists chose to reach an agreement with the Syrian State as a last resort for them and their families. Many buses are transferring them and their families to the city of Jarabulus, after they refused to settle their affairs and chose to go there. However, the vast majority of residents chose to stay in their houses and resort to the Syrian State.

It has been proven that the allegations of certain States, including some States members of the Council, on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta were lies, just as we saw in Aleppo and other places. As it turned out, terrorist group warehouses were full of medication and food, monopolized by their elements who sold some of those items to civilians at exorbitant prices. At this point, I must ask: Did the three countries call for this meeting in order to legitimize the Israeli aggression that occurred this morning or to impede the implementation of the agreement reached with their terrorist tools?

In this context, I must thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for recognizing the true nature of what these countries were preparing for, and aptly called for the meeting to be held under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security". That is the correct agenda item.

We have conveyed to the Security Council, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and what used to be called the Joint Investigative Mechanism 145 letters, the latest on 1 April 2018. I thank the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan for pointing out that the Council members do not read and that the Council does not respond to those letters. The letters contain accurate information. They indicate that armed terrorist groups possess toxic chemical substances, notably chlorine and sarin. We have warned time and again that those groups were preparing to commit crimes involving chemical weapons against innocent Syrians, and were working with the White Helmets to fabricate evidence, photograph locations and film Hollywood-like scenes with everything staged in order to blame the Syrian Government and influence public opinion against Syria and its allies. Those countries call for the holding of meetings such as this in order to create a pretext that would justify any military aggression against Syria.

It seems that the directors of that terrorist scene failed to perfect their web of lies. We note that in each of those theatrical scenes on the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Government, the substances never seem to affect the armed elements, but only women and children. These chemical weapons seem to discriminate against women and children and do not affect armed men. It suffices to wash away these chemicals with water in front of the camera. Water appears to heal everything. Rescue workers never [illegible] to wear protective masks. The Syrian Arab Army does not use these substances because it does not possess them to begin with. The Americans destroyed them on the vessel *MV Cape Ray* in the Mediterranean. So, the Syrian Arab Army uses these substances, which it does not possess, only when it is making military progress. How strange that is!

This vehement campaign lacks the minimum standards of credibility. It relies on fabricated information on social media by elements of armed terrorist groups and their operators. I announce from this table that the Syrian Government is fully prepared to facilitate an OPCW fact-finding mission to Douma,

where the incident is alleged to have occurred, as soon as possible to investigate and verify these allegations. We endorse the Russian proposal to hear a briefing on the fact-finding mission's report after its visit to Al-Raqqa. We welcome this visit as soon as possible.

I hope that this offer does not suffer the same fate as the first offer we made to former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon after the Khan Al-Assal incident of chemical substance use in March 2013. At that time, we asked the Secretary-General to provide assistance to the Syrian Government in immediately investigating what happened in the town of Khan Al-Assal. It took the United Nations four months and 11 days to send Mr. Sellström, as Council members recall. Yes, it took the United Nations four months and 11 days. That is how the United Nations interpreted the term "immediately" — four months and 11 days. When Mr. Sellström arrived in Damascus to investigate what had happened in Khan Al-Assal, terrorists in Ghouta were instructed to use chemical substances again. Mr. Sellström therefore left Khan Al-Assal and moved to Ghouta. Council members should be aware that since March 2013, investigations into what happened in Khan Al-Assal have not taken place.

Today, we directly accuse Washington, D.C., Paris, London, Riyadh, Doha and Ankara of providing Da'esh, Al-Nusra Front, Jaysh Al-Islam, Faylaq Al-Rahman and scores of other affiliated terrorist groups with toxic chemical substances to be used against Syrian civilians. We accuse them of inciting those massacres and of fabricating evidence to falsely blame the Syrian Government for the use of toxic chemical substances in order to prepare the ground for an aggression against my country, just as the United States and the United Kingdom did in Iraq in 2003.

Yes, we say to the United States, the United Kingdom and France that, in Syria and Iraq, we eliminated the vast majority of Da'esh elements within three years — not within 30 years, as President Obama has said. Those States have plans to justify undermining the stability of the region. Yes, we say to Saudi Arabia today that we cut off its terrorist tentacles — the gangs of Jaysh Al-Islam — in eastern Ghouta. Yes, we say to Qatar and Turkey that we cut off their terrorist tentacles — the gangs of the Al-Nusra Front and Faylaq al-Rahman — in eastern Ghouta. I say to all those who sent moderate, armed, genetically modified opposition fighters to our land that we eliminated these toxic exports. We call on those exporters to bear the consequences of their actions, as some surviving elements will return to their original countries.

The issue is very simple. Let me just say that on our borders with Turkey and in the separation zone in the Golan with Israel, there are tens of thousands of good, moderate terrorists with their light weapons, long beards, black banners and white helmets. Whoever wants to adopt them should submit an application to their operators. They are ready to go to Europe and the West as refugees.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic stresses once again that it does not possess chemical weapons of any type, including chlorine. We condemn anew the use of chemical weapons at anytime, anywhere and in any circumstances. My country, Syria, reaffirms its readiness to cooperate fully with the OPCW in fulfilling its commitments under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction.

The Russian Centre for Reconciliation in Syria announced today that Russian military experts have carried out investigations in Douma and confirmed that they have found no sign of the use of chemical weapons there. While treating the sick in the hospitals of Douma, Russian doctors have proven that these patients have not been subjected to any chemical substance. What we were seeing there was nothing but Hollywood-style scenes.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.